

Housing Committee

Public Hearing on H.B. 6461 March 1, 2011

Written Testimony of Scott C. Bertrand

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Housing Committee: My name is Scott Bertrand and I am the recent past President of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials more commonly known as CONN-NAHRO. I am also the Executive Director of the Enfield Housing Authority where I have worked for over nine years. Prior to Enfield, I was employed with the Meriden Housing Authority and have worked for private multi-family property management companies.

I oppose House Bill 6461.

As many will likely recall, a similar Bill, S.B. 320 was proposed last year but was vetoed last year by Governor Rell. The legislation proposed this year is also includes many unresolved issues. These issues include, but are not limited to:

- There is no definition of what constitutes a recognizable tenant organization.
- It will shift the appointment of the tenant commissioner from publically elected officials to unaccountable tenant organizations that may not be representative of all tenants' interests.
- The tenant appointed may not be a tenant in good standing.
- The potential conflict with federal regulations for housing authorities with both federal and state housing programs
- The logistical issues associated with elections on multiple sites and more clearly explaining who will run these elections.
- A State Supreme Court Case regarding conflict of interest (New Haven V. Dorsey)
- The potential fiscal impact of an election on local housing authorities that have limited resources and receive little, if any, ongoing financial support from the State of Connecticut.
- The loss of appointment and removal power of the local elected official(s).

The current Statute already requires the appointment of a tenant commissioner by local officials such as town councils and mayors. The statute also requires that tenant associations be allowed an opportunity to make recommendations to the local elected official(s). The residents of public housing have the ability to be represented by seeking an appointment in the same manner as any resident of the community. Therefore, they are well represented under the current system. A system has been in place for many years and in my opinion, worked very well.

I am unaware of any cases where this process has had a significant negative impact on the residents of public housing. The question that needs to be asked is why is this

major change so important now? If it is not been problematic, will this change better represent the interests of all residents of publicly financed housing in Connecticut or the interests of a few?

I would also like to point out that there thousands of citizens in Connecticut that live in publically financed housing that are operated by private companies and non-profit organizations. If this legislation is enacted, these tenants will not have the same representation as housing authority residents. Consideration should be given to this potential disparity.

It is also my understanding that a compromise recommended by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), supported by CONN-NAHRO, has been offered.

With consideration to the above, I urge the Housing Committee to oppose H.B. 6461.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott C. Bertrand